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Turning Over a New Leaf with Prop. 47

A tremendous “second chance” opportunity awaits hundreds of thousands of ex-offenders who have yet to take advantage of Proposition 47 to help rebuild their lives.

Acting on a motion by Supervisors Hilda Solis and Mark Ridley-Thomas, the Board of Supervisors launched a massive effort to reach out to those eligible to have their felonies downgraded to misdemeanors, and boost their chances of becoming productive members of society.

“With Prop. 47, people who have committed certain non-violent and non-serious crimes have a chance to turn over a new leaf,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “We must not squander this opportunity – this mandate – to reform our criminal justice system so that it’s less punitive and more humane, with the potential to be healing and transformative.”

“Connecting these individuals to employment opportunities will give them a second chance because nothing stops a bullet like a job,” said Supervisor Solis. “While we realize that intensive healing of trauma is even more important than employment, there is no doubt that a job can provide a sense of dignity, purpose, hope and an income – all of which help prevent crimes.”

Prop. 47, approved by 60 percent of California voters on Nov. 4, 2014, downgrades certain drug possession felonies to misdemeanors, and requires misdemeanor sentencing for petty theft, receiving stolen property and forging or writing bad checks when the amount involved is \$950 or less.

No one is automatically released from state prison because of Prop 47. Instead, it allows those already serving a felony conviction to petition the court for

resentencing. Those who have already completed their sentences can ask the trial court to downgrade their conviction.

An estimated 690,000 Los Angeles County residents are eligible for re-sentencing under Prop. 47, according to the Public Defender and Alternate Public Defender; however, fewer than 50,000 have petitioned for it.

“The clock is ticking: the law set a 2017 deadline for all resentencing petitions,” said Supervisor Solis. “If this deadline passes without a significant acceleration in applications, Los Angeles County will have missed a significant opportunity to set people on the road to productive citizenship, and by default, we will make our neighborhoods more vulnerable to potential crimes.”

The motion approved by the Board creates a task force aimed at maximizing the number of ex-offenders who can benefit from Prop. 47, by linking them to County resources, as well as local law schools and/or pro bono private attorneys.

A separate task force would bring public, private, philanthropic, academic and religious institutions together to provide wraparound services. These include: family reunification counseling, permanent housing, healthcare, mental health and substance abuse treatments, workforce development and vocational training, educational programs, apprenticeships and employment opportunities.

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